

The President's Daily Brief

16 February 1970

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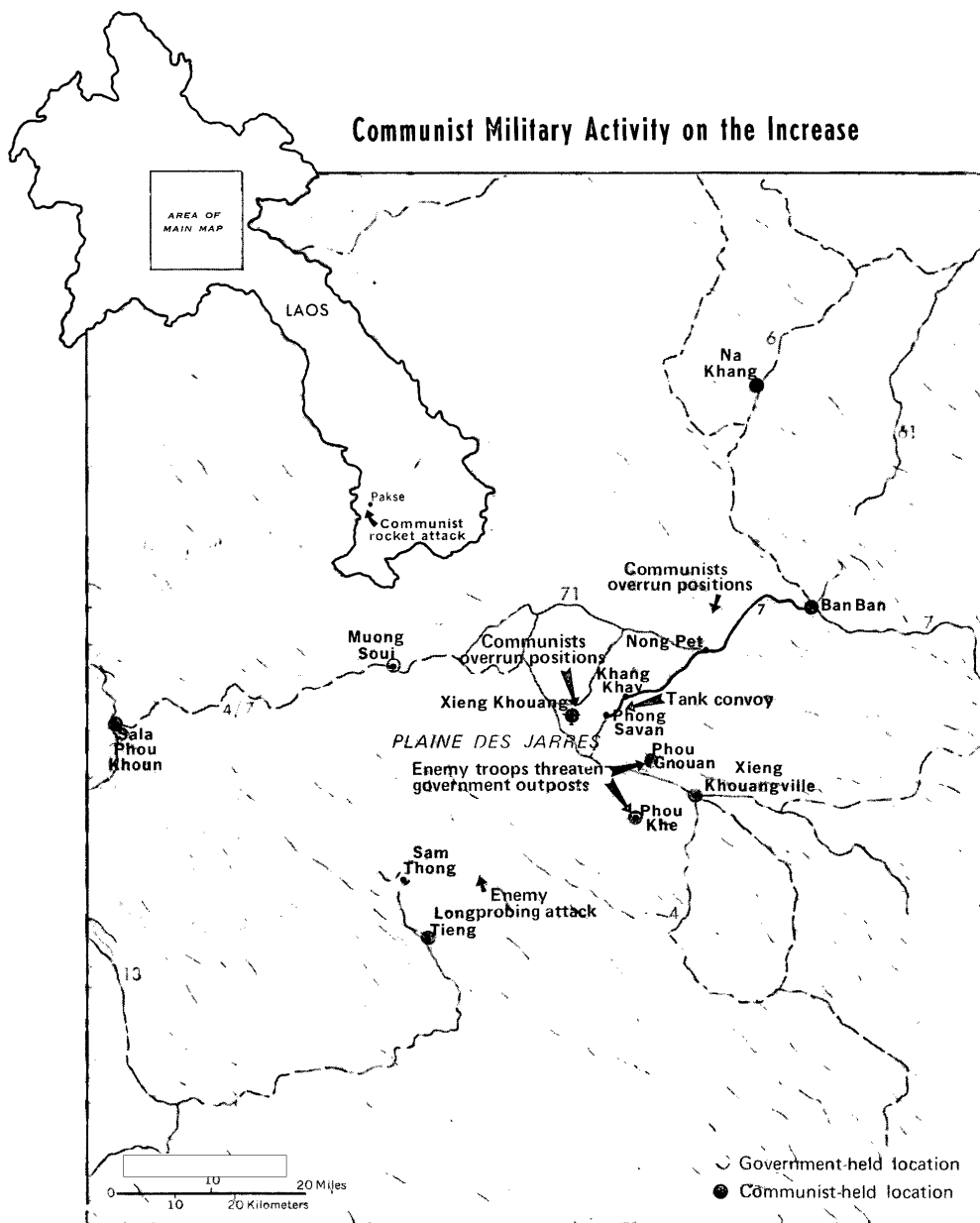
PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

In Laos, Communist forces are beginning to close in on General Vang Pao's main base on the Plaine des Jarres. (Page 1)

South Vietnamese forces appear to have thwarted a major Communist push into the northern reaches of the Mekong Delta. (Page 3)

Tension between the fedayeen and the Jordanian Government has eased since Husayn's press conference, but the situation could easily flare up again if the fedayeen push the King too hard. (Page 4)

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LAOS

Communist forces are closing in on General Vang Pao's forward command post at Xieng Khouang airfield, the government's main base on the Plaine des Jarres. The enemy kept the airfield under sporadic mortar fire all day yesterday and overran several government positions four miles south of the base.

[redacted] forward elements of the North Vietnamese tank convoy on Route 7 were near Phong Savan, about three miles east of the Xieng Khouang airstrip. In addition, a radio terminal of a North Vietnamese battalion associated with the 312th Division moved into the vicinity of Phong Savan.

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The North Vietnamese now dominate all of the high ground on the northeast side of the Plaine. Vang Pao's Meos yesterday lost their last outpost northeast of Nong Pet. The pullback leaves no government forces to harass Communist supply convoys on Route 7 between Ban Ban and Khang Khay.

Recent intercepts point up the concern the North Vietnamese have for the security of their Route 7 supply line. One message ordered that if a mine sweeper was not immediately available, individuals were to "pick up the mines in order to destroy them."

Little new fighting has been reported south-east of the Plaine, but enemy troops are moving into position against the two pieces of high ground still held by government forces. There are also signs of increased Communist activity near government positions defending the approaches to Vang Pao's headquarters at Long Tieng.

There does not seem to be a major enemy build up under way at this time, but even small-scale skirmishing around Long Tieng might distract Vang Pao's efforts in other active areas.

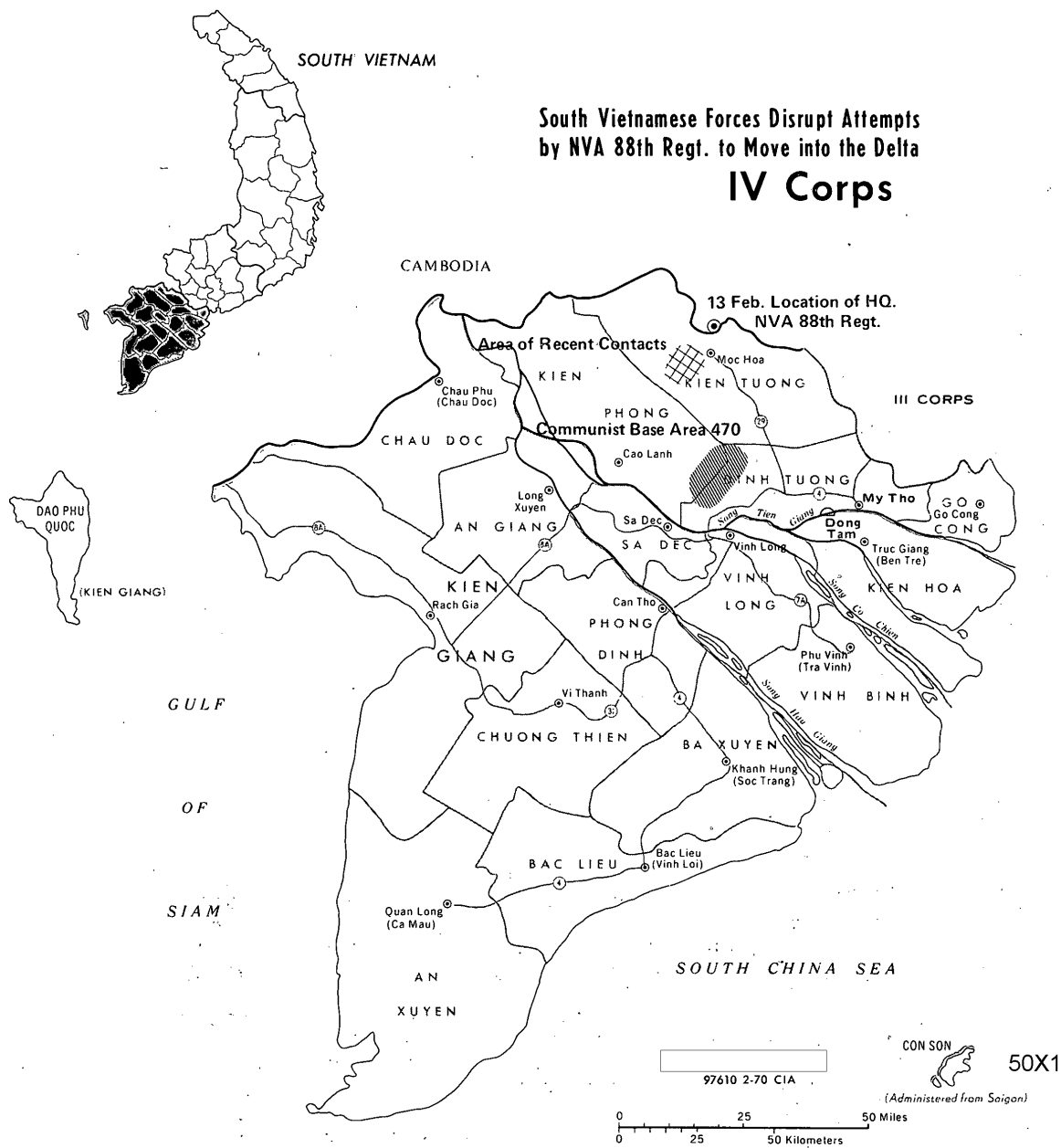
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Marginal visibility continues to impede effective tactical air support to government forces. Intensive air strikes have caused lingering secondary fires that contribute to the haze and smog overlying much of the Plaine. The enemy is well aware of this situation and may be awaiting a further deterioration of weather conditions before making an all-out drive against the Plaine.

In the southern panhandle, the Communists launched a limited rocket attack against the government's military headquarters at Pakse early this morning. Several houses belonging to the Lao Army were destroyed; one person was slightly wounded. This is the second rocket attack in as many months against Pakse. Both the timing and the limited nature of the attack suggest it was intended as a diversionary measure in support of the Communist offensive against the Plaine.



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SOUTH VIETNAM

South Vietnamese forces appear to have thwarted a major Communist push into the northern reaches of the Mekong Delta. During the past ten days, government regular and territorial security forces have clashed with elements of the North Vietnamese 88th Regiment attempting to infiltrate through exposed terrain west of Moc Hoa, the capital of Kien Tuong Province. In their blocking actions, the South Vietnamese have killed more than 200 enemy troops, while allied artillery and air strikes have probably caught many more enemy retreating toward Cambodian sanctuary. The regiment is believed to be trying to move to the relative security of Communist Base Area 470, a redoubt long used by the enemy to support military operations in the upper delta provinces.

Captured documents and prisoner interrogations indicate that the 88th--one of five North Vietnamese regiments to move from III to IV Corps since mid-1969--has the mission of coordinating with indigenous Viet Cong local forces in disrupting Vietnamization and pacification programs in Dinh Tuong Province, including attacks on the important provincial capital of My Tho. Other potential targets in the province include the former US 9th Division headquarters at Dong Tam, now the home of the South Vietnamese 7th Division, and defensive positions guarding Route 4--Saigon's lifeline to the delta.

The ability of North Vietnamese regulars to operate in force in the northern delta, however, may be hampered by the geography of the region. The flat and often swampy terrain, laced with canals, offers little natural cover for concealment of large military units or for active supply lanes and storage areas.

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JORDAN

Only minor incidents have been reported since the "cease-fire" on 13 February, but the situation could easily flare up again if the fedayeen push King Husayn too hard. The fedayeen have allowed some of their street barricades in Amman to be removed, but they are still intimidating the police, commandeering vehicles, and stealing ammunition and weapons. In one instance, the fedayeen seized a UN vehicle and repainted it in their own camouflage colors.

Government forces also remain in place and on alert.

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so far the army has been only marginally involved while the police have been bearing the brunt of fedayeen hostility.

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Husayn at his press conference Saturday was clearly trying to smooth things over. He tried to identify his motives and aims with those of the fedayeen, and to attribute the uproar over his security decrees to a "misunderstanding." But at the same time an undertone of toughness was evident, particularly in Husayn's emphasis on law and order. He thus may balk if the fedayeen continue to press for complete abrogation of the security decrees.

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